PAGAN INNOCENCE

K. F. WONG

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE RT HON.
MALCOLM MacDONALD



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Introduction

by the Rt Hon MALCOLM MacDONALD

Mr K F Wong is a magician with his camera Every photograph that he takes is a work of art The selection of his pictures in this book presents a brilliant and beautiful panorama of the Sarawak jungle and its human residents — the Ibans, Kayans, Kenyahs and other natives who are famous by their collective (though not quite scientifically correct) name of Dayaks

Mr Wong is not a tourist with a Rolleiflex who dashes into a country, makes a collection of snapshots which give a charming but superficial impression of its inhabitants and scenery, and then as hurriedly departs again Born in Sarawak, he has lived most of his life in that attractive corner of the tropics and he knows the land and its peoples extremely well In particular he has made many journeys into the interior, meeting the Dayaks as a friend, staying with them in their long houses and observing their mode of living with respect and affection So his portraits of them are careful and accurate studies

One of the important aspects of the photographs in his book is that they catch the Dayaks at a moment which is passing, when they are still pursuing the customary pastimes of their ancestors in the traditional dress which those forebears favoured for centuries Alas, many 'modern' notions are now travelling up-river in Sarawak, inducing the people in the long-houses to adopt new costumes and new ways Traditional native society is therefore undergoing a critical transformation — a state of affairs which provokes certain reflections

What impressed me most about the Ibans, Kayans, Kenyahs and other

Their young men and women married for love, monogamy was the invariable rule, and mistakes could be corrected without too much difficulty by divorce Parents doted on their children Ever since the famous White Rajahs spread security and peace through the land a hundred years ago their well-being had been assured The inmates of a long-house no longer lived in fear of raiders coming to slay the men and carry off the women and children as slaves I do not mean to suggest that they had no nostalgic regrets for the good old days when decapitation was the national sport Many times on my visits to Sarawak my Dayak friends hinted at the pleasures of head-hunting, and more than once when they heard that letters critical of me had appeared in the local newspapers, they asked whether they had my permission to seek out the authors and lop off their heads But enforced abstinence from that pastime had its compensations The family circle was now not only sacred, but also secure

The pagans feared only one thing — the displeasure of the evil spirits who inhabited the forest and rivers They were like children who felt it necessary to utter frequently the prayer

> 'From things that go bump in the night
> Good Lord deliver us!'

Only those unfriendly demons introduced an element of uncertainty, malevolence and danger into the pagan world of a dozen years ago The evil spirits, however, were to a fair extent counteracted by other, kindlier hobgoblins who also lived in the jungle, and who adopted a more sympathetic attitude to weak and erring mortals So men had unseen allies as well as unseen foes in the wilds around them, and on the whole they felt confident that they would be allowed to continue enjoying the simple pleasures of existence

The natives of Sarawak therefore largely preserved that happiness which is sometimes reputed to reign in Arcadian primitive societies Such contentment with life is rare in the contemporary world It has largely disappeared in so-called civilized countries, and is something to be cherished as much as possible wherever it remains We British authorities — who since the last Rajah Brooke ceded Sarawak to the King in 1946 are now responsible for its peoples' welfare — would be guilty of wrong doing if we destroyed the congenial tranquillity of tribal communities thereby giving them 'progressive' ideas to

which emanated from barbers' shops in London and New York. Their customary long black tresses falling like horses' tails down their backs were shorn until their necks were as bare as those of European businessmen freshly snipped by a hairdresser's scissors. When that happened, part of the peculiar beauty of those 'wild men from Borneo' disappeared; and I for one felt fearful lest — as happened to Samson when Delilah shore his locks — their natural strength of character, too, might then leave them.

But no argument could persuade them to be conservative in these small, perhaps trivial but attractive habits of personal appearance whilst being progressive in other, larger matters. I remember one day speaking earnestly on the subject to a group of Iban youths. I was feeling sad at the prospective disappearance of much pleasing and significant native custom, and was arguing that they should preserve as far as possible their indigenous styles of dress. I tried to play on their racial pride, speaking of the robust virility and attraction of Iban personality. I explained how the different characters of different races were expressed in their national costumes, and made a passing reference to our Scottish kilt — one of which I was wearing at the time — hoping that no one amongst my keenly attentive listeners knew how deplorably remiss we Scots had in fact become in abandoning our beautiful dress. I urged that, although some great changes must be introduced up the Sarawak rivers — such as improved methods of agriculture, better provisions for health, and the opening of schools — other changes would be unnecessary and would be mistakes, not improvements. As an example I said that if they cut short their hair and put on European clothes, they would cease to look like Ibans and might be mistaken for men of some other race.

When this was translated to them one youth grunted sceptically, and passed a remark which made all the others laugh in agreement with him. My interpreter told me that he had said, 'What? Go to school with long hair?'

That seemed to them extremely unscholarly behaviour, to be unreservedly deplored.

It was a significant remark in more ways than one, expressing not only a large degree of indifference to my plea for the preservation of the picturesque in Iban life, but also the Ibans' eager longing for education. That is one of the most potent recent developments in Sarawak. The pagan peoples, hitherto denied schools, and feeling no need for them, now have an almost

passionate desire to see their children put into classrooms and taught lessons which will enable them to take their proper place beside their Chinese, Malay and other fellow-countrymen in Sarawak

I sometimes think that the impulse which makes them wish for schools is a direct descendant of the impulse which made them wish, not long ago, to take enemies' heads Aware of their natural energy, intelligence and ability, they still want not only to be the masters of their own affairs but also to dominate other peoples around them In the old days they expressed this inclination by throwing their weight about on military expeditions, by physical conquest, by taking heads But now that method of self-expression and self-assertion is forbidden, and with a sure instinct they turn to the new method — education They will achieve their purposes by making intellectual instead of physical conquests, and by taking examinations instead of taking heads By these means they will put themselves into a position of equality with, if not superiority over, their Malay, Chinese and other fellow-citizens of Sarawak It is a development pregnant with possibilities for the future there

The fact is, of course, that great changes in the life of the pagan peoples were not only inevitable but desirable Civilized man can introduce bad habits into such unsophisticated native communities, which destroy them, but he can also bring knowledge and services which give them a securer, broader and higher life It is a question of discrimination, of selecting which practices of civilized society to encourage, and which to discourage or prohibit That is the problem which has faced at one time or another everyone who has tried to bring civilization to 'uncivilized' peoples Some attempts have failed grievously, whilst others have to a greater or lesser extent succeeded As our experience of the problem increases, our wisdom in coping with it also grows It is the task which British administrators are tackling in many Colonial territories, and Sarawak is only typical of many others, though it differs from some because until a decade ago so little had been done to start the transition from the 'primitive' to the 'civilized' state in pagan society The Brookes hardly began the work Indeed, the aim of their policy was to avoid it Whilst ending the grosser forms of savagery, they wished to shield the pagans as far and as long as possible from any such transition They stopped head-hunting, permitted Christian Missions to proselytize in a few areas, and

introduced some extremely inadequate health services, but otherwise they left the primitive simplicity of the local world almost completely undisturbed. The natives were happy. But they were also ignorant — deplorably ignorant.

Ignorance was bliss in Sarawak; but it also involved skin diseases, hookworm, fevers, harmful superstitions and other unfortunate consequences. With all due respect to the innocent simplicity of native life, the persistence of these evils in modern times is unnecessary. They do appalling harm to those who suffer from them; and any Government in Kuching — whether Brookeish or British — which allowed them to continue would be failing in their duty towards the people under their charge. It would therefore be wrong to become too romantically sentimental about the simple joy of primitive society, and to seek to prevent all change. Change is as desirable as it is inevitable. The Government should take control of the situation and try to guide development so that it comes in a degree, at a pace and in directions which will bring true benefit to the local population.

In the end the change will no doubt progress very far. Iban and other pagan society as we know it will disappear as a result of a continuous and, eventually, complete process of advance. Once such a movement begins, it cannot be checked. The original impetus persists. The first set of changes produces a desire for further changes, and so-called progress works out its inexorable evolution. Therefore, although the early measures planned by the Government may be strictly and deliberately limited in scope, we must realize that they cannot long remain so limited. Perhaps it is too much to hope that the whole development can be wisely guided. It is as if native society were an ancient mountain exposed suddenly to a mighty storm. Initially a few loose boulders near the summit are dislodged and begin to slide from their places; but as they tumble they gather others, until a huge mass of old earth and rocks is careering in an avalanche down the mountain-side, sweeping many antique landmarks before it.

The event is in many ways sad. The old mountain landscape was picturesque and tranquil. But the change is unavoidable. That is the way in which natural forces sometimes work. And when the transformation is finished, whatever great alterations may appear on its surface, the mountain itself remains in all essentials as before, losing none of its innate strength, preserving its own true character, and standing firmly rooted on its native earth.

Pagan society in Sarawak is in the early stages of such an experience. Many of its most characteristic features are doomed to disappear in a social and political avalanche. Ancient customs in dress, architecture, agriculture, social habits, ceremonials and other manners of up-river, jungle-edge life will all, sooner or later, go. In co-operation with the local leaders, we must do our best to ensure that the new features which take their places are good. It will be hard to guide the avalanche, and parts of it will probably be uncontrollable, but we have power to influence its course, and to save from destruction some of the best and sturdiest indigenous native ways of living.

Above all we must save the essential stuff of which the people themselves are made. They are very fine men and women — intelligent, self-confident, capable and ambitious. We must not turn them into poor, dependent, mimicking copy-cats of ourselves — drinking cocktails, rockin and rollin' and emulating our other less laudable habits — as has happened to other once admirable tribes elsewhere. We must help them so to guide the historic transition in their society that they remain racy of their own soil, preserve their own character, and develop further their own peculiar genius. If they do that, they will become some of the most talented and important, as well as most attractive, peoples of South East Asia.

Their good looks and charm are apparent in Mr Wong's photographs. No camera man has a more discriminating eye and a more impeccable taste. But he achieves much more than a scintillating portrait gallery of handsome Adams and beautiful Eves, for he succeeds in capturing much of the essential traditional 'atmosphere' of their lives. All who love — as I do — the splendid natives of Sarawak will rejoice that it should be caught before it fades, and preserved in the pages of a book which Mr Wong's skilful artistry makes worthy of them.

Pagan Innocence

SHE made a most attractive picture, with her perfect figure, her olive-brown skin, her small, pretty face and her graceful bearing, as she walked down towards the river to bathe She wore only a bright sarong wrapped around her waist leaving her firm full breasts bare From the frequent glances she gave me it was obvious that she knew I was watching her, but she did not seem to mind Indeed, as she splashed the cool river water over her lissom body, she giggled, showing her white teeth and seemingly enjoying the attention I was paying her

Such simple modesty, such freedom from care, such physical beauty, can only belong to Dayak women Ever since I was a boy, my imagination has been captivated by their remarkable beauty In the days when I lived in Sibu, in the heart of the most populated Dayak country, I used to run away from home and accompany up river traders deep into the interior where for a while I lived with the Ibans or Sea Dayaks as one of themselves in their long-houses I realized even then what superb natural studies I could obtain of these people and how I could show their way of life and customs

Sarawak is no longer an unknown country, however remote it appears to be The British Colony of Sarawak lies just north of the equator in South East Asia, a long narrow strip of country about five hundred miles in length It is a land of innumerable rivers which rise in the hills of the interior and wind their course towards the coast of the South China Sea Because Sarawak is situated in the equatorial belt, jungle trees flourish abundantly and reach

atmosphere is one of serenity and calm, broken only by the gay chirruping of birds In places where the river rushes through hilly regions, boulders of hard rocks and stones piled up in its passage cause rapids and waterfalls which give out their own music When the heavy rains fall, water rises rapidly and sweeps over the rocks, turning the rapids into vicious and dangerous maelstroms

As you journey farther up-stream, you realize that you are approaching your goal, for hollowed tree trunks fashioned into boats and manned by natives frequently glide past With what grace and ease they manage their flimsy craft Here, at places along the bank, you will get your first glimpses of Iban women, naked to the waist, washing in the river or having a bath, and to delight your eye there will always be naked brown children splashing happily about in the water or sitting gaily astride pieces of driftwood These youngsters swim like fishes, indeed the river is their playground On higher ground, a few hundred feet from the bank, there stands a wooden structure so long that part of it is hidden by trees This is the famous long house, their home

After an eight hour journey you finally arrive at Kapit, a small trading village about a hundred and fifty miles from the Rejang s mouth, where you spend the night in a room provided by a hospitable Chinese shopkeeper

Though Kapit is a one-street village of shop houses, it is the centre of a busy trade in jungle produce Dayaks from the vast interior pour in, bringing their crops of rubber, rattan, illipe nuts and other saleable articles to barter for necessities like salt, biscuits and clothing A Government District Officer, assisted by the Police and Dayak chieftains, keeps law and order in the area

Leaving Kapit the next day, you travel much higher up-river, this time seeing the real Sarawak From this point it is necessary to engage a guide and interpreter, but this will cause no difficulty, for one of the shopkeepers will gladly oblige He will take you to one of the long-houses known to him, where he will introduce you to his Dayak friends

The Dayak long-house is an interesting building It is erected beside a river on cleared ground along the top of the bank Wood and bamboo are the materials used, and the house is raised on piles stretching for a distance of a few hundred feet In the long-house as many as forty or fifty complete families live under one roof, for the Dayaks favour a communal way of life, chiefly because of economic and military necessity Food is difficult to obtain

in the jungle, so that, when a lucky hunter returns with a wild pig or other game, the meat is shared. Security is another reason; not so long ago tribal wars were frequent, and naturally there was added safety in numbers. Large families gathered together in one building could put up a formidable defence in case of attack.

To enter a long-house you must climb a steep tree-trunk with notches cut for steps, hand-rails being rarely provided. On one occasion I climbed up on all fours, with cameras and photographic equipment hanging from both my shoulders, and created much laughter among the natives who watched my performance. At the top of the ladder you arrive at an open veranda which runs the whole length of the building and is constructed of bamboo poles tied together with rattan, leaving wide gaps. You must mind your step lest you put a foot through the interstices. Crossing this veranda you enter a covered gallery which is used by all the inmates as a meeting place for drink and gossip. Opening into this gallery is a succession of rooms, one for each family. This room is used communally by the family for cooking, eating and sleeping.

The Dayaks are the truly indigenous people of Sarawak. They are divided into groups such as Ibans, Kenyahs, Kayans, Punans, Muruts and others. Hundreds of years ago they came from neighbouring islands and countries and each group has preserved its own customs and dialect. The Ibans are the most numerous, numbering about two hundred thousand.

Though they differ in details, all the tribes of Sarawak are lightly clad. The men normally wear only coloured loin-cloths or shorts. They are muscular types with blue-black tattooing on their throats, shoulders, arms, thighs and legs. They do not cut their hair but allow the long black tresses to fall down their backs. They love to dress up, however, and on gala occasions and festivals they don cloaks of monkey furs and wear caps of hornbills' feathers, while brass ear-rings dangle from their pierced ear-lobes. They make great play with their festive garb and are very proud of it.

The women, like the men, usually favour scanty attire, wearing only short skirts of black cloth or brilliantly coloured sarongs. They are completely naked above their waists. Like the men, however, they love to dress up. On festive occasions, corsets of silvered-brass hoops and belts encase their hips; ear-rings, large and small, hang from their ears, and bracelets and necklaces of

coloured beads are draped around their arms and necks They are extremely vain, but only in a childlike way

Without exception, the tribes of Sarawak are pagan Their economic life is sustained almost completely by agriculture, fishing and hunting Since their staple dish is rice, their main occupation is growing padi, which, as the interior is hilly, is grown on hillsides Suitable areas are selected and cleared of jungle trees, which are burned Plots are allotted to each family and the work is shared between both sexes The men bore holes in the ground and are then followed by the womenfolk, who drop seeds into the holes Once the seeds are sown a fence is built around the whole area to keep out wild pigs, deer and other animals which would destroy the cultivated plot

After the initial seed sowing the plots from growth to maturity are tended wholly by women, while the men are free to engage in other activities such as fishing and hunting At harvest time the crop is gathered and conveyed to the long-house for drying, threshing and storing During this period there is much drinking, dancing and festival-making

If the plot is new, it is given a rest of several months before planting begins again, if the soil shows signs of exhaustion, a new virgin site is selected and the jungle once again cleared and prepared for seeding Naturally this method of rice growing brings its own problems to the Government, for it necessitates the wholesale destruction of trees, which cannot go on unchecked without serious forestry repercussions

Besides growing padi the authorities have taught the natives how to grow rubber, sago, pepper, vegetables and maize, which have valuable export value The long-house is the centre of Dayak life In it and around it pigs, hens, goats and cattle are kept to supplement their rice diet Other produce gathered from the forest includes rattan, illipe nuts, gutta-percha and birds' nests, which are brought to trading stations and bartered for other necessities

When hunting, the Dayaks use blow-pipes about eight feet long, fashioned out of hollowed bamboo or other wood stems Into one end they insert a dart dipped in poison brewed from the sap of the ipoh tree Holding the charged pipe to their lips and taking careful aim, they blow the light dart towards the target With the march of time, shot-guns are now being used instead of the traditional blow-pipe, but many tragedies have taken place through inexpert handling of firearms when hunting in groups, the Dayaks have no system of

shooting and, when game is sighted, everybody fires from different directions with the result that there are many injuries and accidental deaths from gun-shot wounds.

Everyone knows that, once upon a time, the Dayaks' favourite sport was head-hunting; indeed they were known throughout the world as head-hunters, but that was in the bad old days when there were frequent battles not only between different tribes but also between the inmates of one long-house and another. The severed head of an enemy was highly prized and had an honourable place in every household. Even to this day bunches of these grisly war trophies can still be seen hanging from rafters outside the chieftain's room.

Heads were sought, however, not only during wars. It is said that formerly a young man was considered unacceptable by a maiden unless he had taken at least one head, thus proving his manhood. These grim trophies were seldom acquired in open conflict. The young man in search of a head would sneak behind an enemy and attack by surprise without any danger to himself. He would often climb a tree and from the topmost branches use his blow-pipe for the kill, descending from his safety perch to sever the head after the victim had already died. The British Government eventually suppressed head-hunting on a large scale, but so inherent was it that during the Second World War, when the Japanese occupied Sarawak, head-hunting was resumed with such fervour that the Japanese had cause to fear those lethal blow-pipes. Many Japanese camps were entirely wiped out with only headless bodies remaining to tell the story of Dayak vengeance.

The Dayaks love cock-fighting, which though brutal is regarded as the national sport of Sarawak. They highly treasure their fighting cocks which are very carefully tended and fed, being always kept in covered cages well away from other birds reared merely for slaughter. Some favourite cocks are kept in bedrooms and their raucous crowing at early morning makes sleep impossible. Because of their seclusion, the cocks become restive and fierce. Only in the evening are they brought out for training. A mock fight is then arranged, but the birds are seldom allowed their freedom for more than a few minutes. This increases their ferocity.

During festivals, natives from all parts of the jungle gather at a pre-determined place to stage cock-fights, which engender all the excitement of a

big race meeting A few minutes before the fight begins the full grown cocks are brought out for public viewing and admiration A chieftain usually acts as umpire A circular enclosure is marked out under the shade of trees A razor-sharp, two-inch curved steel blade is attached to the left spur of each bird The opposing cocks are put in the enclosure to face each other and at a signal, are let loose In less than a minute they clash in mid air So swift is the action that it is difficult to see when the blade has found its mark There is a jumble of feathers and the next thing one sees is the dropping of blood from a bird, or even from both The audience grows tense with excitement until one of the combatants staggers and falls dead In a few minutes the game is over and trouble begins, for the Dayaks are bad losers and it is not uncommon for arguments to arise which sometimes result in rival owners coming to blows The rule of the game is that the birds must fight until one is killed or runs from the other Usually it is death which decides the result

These pagan tribes have countless religious beliefs, handed down through generations Their whole life is governed by spirits, both good and evil Before a Dayak will engage in any important enterprise, such as a wedding or choosing the site for a new long house, he will consult the local medicine-men, who are believed to have power to communicate with spirits Dayaks believe that the spirits must always be appeased, and their festivals always begin with an offering to the spirits They constantly watch the movements of certain animals and birds if they behave in one way, the omen is good, if in another, the omen is bad

Dayak children are happy for two reasons they enjoy much freedom and are conscious of the love which their parents give to them Life for them is one grand gala, with nothing to do all day but play As they grow older, the boys turn to hunting and fishing, while the girls help their mothers in the daily household chores The children are comparatively clean, for they bathe in the river at least twice a day

Among bachelors and unmarried girls sexual intercourse is enjoyed with complete freedom Indeed the sex act is as natural to them as eating and drinking, and is openly discussed without embarrassment A male attracts a girl's attention chiefly by his physique and exploits, while the girls attract the men by wearing corsets of brass hoops, many rings, necklaces and bracelets, and displaying mouthfuls of gold teeth

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In some long-houses there are special quarters for bachelors and unmarried girls, and not surprisingly there is much activity in this area each night. A young buck will approach the bed of the girl whom he admires, introduce himself, and speak of his love or his adventures. If the girl accepts his advances, he is allowed to stay for the night. If not, she lights a small oil-lamp beside her bed; this is a sign that he is not welcome and it is not subject to argument. He departs without question. In one night a girl may be visited by several young men, especially if she is more than usually attractive, but if a man finds that he has been anticipated by another rival he leaves the girl's company at once. If a boy sleeps with a girl on several occasions and shows no signs of proposing marriage, her parents question his intentions. If he does not wish to marry the girl, he is forbidden to sleep with her again. Once married, the couple remain faithful to each other.

A pleasing Dayak custom is that visitors are always welcome, be they from another part of the river or even from another country.

One of the duties of women in a long-house is to ply visitors with *tuak*, a locally brewed alcoholic drink made from fermented rice wine, and in this ceremony they find enthusiastic delight. A woman will raise a glassful of wine to the visitor's lips and maintain her hold until he has drained every drop.

Another quaint custom is for the woman to sit before the guest and sing a musical greeting called a *pantun*. When she has finished, she offers the visitor another glassful of *tuak* in the usual manner and then passes on to the next guest. This process is repeated by other girls so that, before the evening is over, the visitor is filled to the brim with liquor and is unaware of much else that transpires.

When a really important visitor arrives at a long-house, he is often asked to prepare a meal with which to appease the spirits. The solemn ceremony is called the *bedara*. When the visitor arrives at the river bank or open veranda of the long-house, a young girl hands him a glass of *tuak* and says, '*Buai.*' This means, 'Offer it to your attendant spirit!' The Ibans believe that a spirit accompanies everyone wherever he goes, and this spirit must also be welcomed. The contents of the glass are spilled and a second glass is held to the visitor for his enjoyment. He is then led to the place of ceremony, where he is asked to sit cross-legged on a mat. A copper or rattan bracelet is fitted to his wrist by a chieftain, this indicating a gesture of friendship. On the mat are

twenty-seven saucers, arranged in four rows and filled with native delicacies A large empty plate is placed before the visitor on which he is asked to take samples of each dish He is then requested to balance four eggs perpendicularly on the top of the mixture A small cup of *tuak* is finally placed on the summit between the eggs The visitor is next instructed to carry a live cock upside down and wave it above the plate Then the bird is slaughtered and a few feathers are plucked from its tail and dipped in its blood The feathers are then stuck on to the plate of food which is ready for the spirits The visitor is next directed to carry the plate and fix it between bamboo clasps on the top of poles planted in the ground It is said that the spirits enjoy such offerings

This concludes the ceremony of *bedara* Following it comes the singing of *pantuns*, while rounds of drinks are offered by the women in the customary manner

To celebrate a good harvest almost all long houses hold parties at which various ceremonies are performed though all are concerned with the appeasement of the spirits On the appointed day natives from several long houses beside the river gather at one particular long house where on the previous day, the women of the house have been busily engaged in making all sorts of delicacies, while the men have decorated the house with palm fronds and dried banana leaves tied to bamboo poles

The chiefs who are to take part in the festival clothe themselves with cloaks of monkey- or goat fur and feathered caps and wear swords The women adorn themselves with flowers red coloured skirts and a large amount of jewellery At an agreed time the chieftain who is to perform the ceremony arrives in his wild garb and, after the usual appeasement of his attendant spirit, drives a spear through the throat of a sacrifical pig which has been placed on the open veranda He is then conducted into the house where he performs a *bedara* to appease the spirits *Pantuns* of welcome are sung by young women with much flowing of rice wine Then the next part of the ritual begins A huge mop made from long strips of dried banana leaf is handed to the chieftain, who draws his sword in the other hand With others similarly armed the chieftain utters frightening wild shrieks, shakes the mop violently and slashes the air with his sword around an enclosure where the evil spirits are supposed to gather Having exorcized the spirits here, they all

proceed to the far end of the gallery, stop at the door of each family, and challenge any demons that still lurk in the premises. This having been done, they accept tumblers of *tuak* offered them by the grateful inmates of each room. The quantity depends on the number of rooms the house contains, but they consume a tremendous volume of rice wine.

Meanwhile hundreds of men sit in the gallery eating, drinking and gossiping, while many other groups are performing *bedaras*. Omen-reading is a favourite item of the festival. This is done by examining the liver of a newly slaughtered pig. With the spirits thus appeased and exorcized, the Ibans then turn to light entertainment. Apart from the women singing *pantuns* and plying the men with drinks, there is often an Iban orchestra consisting of girls playing gongs and drums. There are also many dancing items which are solo performances. A man puts on a cloak of goatskin and an elaborate head-dress of hornbill feathers. He first takes slow deliberate steps and suddenly leaps into the air with fierce shouts. Dancer after dancer comes forward to take turns in demonstrating his prowess. All the dances are war dances.

The Ibans, however, lack the skill of the Kayans and Kenyahs, who are the chief exponents; Iban girls do not dance. But, dance or not, the merriment continues until the early hours of the next morning.

So far I have dealt only with the Ibans, the most numerous group. The next group consists of the Kayan and Kenyah peoples, who are mainly settled in the interior of the Baram River area. To reach them you journey up-river for about a hundred miles from the coast until you come to the upper reaches. Here the country is hilly with many limestone rocks and caves, and, as travellers approach these, the swifts which live in the caves take sudden fright and the sky is thick with millions of beating wings. These swift-caves contain a very important product — birds' nests which the Chinese regard as a delicacy. It is here that the Kayan and Kenyah peoples live.

Once the Kayans and Kenyahs were great enemies of the Ibans and many battles were fought between them. Like the other groups, they migrated into Sarawak from Indonesian Borneo. In comparison with the Ibans, the Kayans and Kenyahs are superior in almost all fields. They are craftsmen and artists. With barbaric imagination they produce carvings of all sorts of weird creatures in a traditional craft whose origins are lost in antiquity. They also differ from the Ibans in the construction of their long-houses, for these are not of poles

tied together in a slipshod manner, but are well constructed of planks strengthened by massive pillars Their roofs, too, are much higher than the Ibans' dwellings, and their rooms are much larger They are progressive and particularly school-conscious Their music, singing and dancing are famous throughout the land They are very class-conscious, too, and have great respect for their hereditary chiefs, who individually own most of the birds'-nests caves, incidentally, which bring them huge incomes

The Kayans and Kenyahs are much bigger in build than the Ibans, and their women mainly wear coloured sarongs high up so that they cover their breasts, though you will meet many women who still wear skirts from the waist, leaving their supple breasts bare The lobes of the women's ears are pierced and stretched to a considerable length by the wearing of many heavy brass ear-rings In the eye of the pagans, the longer the ears the more beautiful they are Another extraordinary feminine adornment is plentiful tattooing of arms and legs Young girls from twelve years old are subject to tattoo operations which are a very painful process Primitive instruments are used and the wounds often turn septic, though they are never fatal

An invitation to a Kayan or Kenyah party should not be missed, for their singing and dancing are of the highest standards in Sarawak Dancing to them is a favourite pastime and both men and women indulge in it Nearly all their dances are attributes to battle, for they are, indeed, brave warriors

The party usually starts off with a round of drinking The long-house gallery is filled to capacity The host, a chieftain, welcomes the visitor with a glass of rice wine The address of welcome is preceded by songs for they are splendid singers A soloist sings the verses and a choir joins in deep tones in the refrain In the still of the jungle night the music is hauntingly melodious The drink is offered the visitor amidst roaring applause More songs and drink follow until the crowd is in a merry mood The dancers are then summoned Musicians appear, each holding a primitive looking instrument called the *saptt* It has three strings and the notes produced are feeble but sweet When they begin to play, a dancer wearing a war cloak and feathered cap, and equipped with a shield and sword, takes the floor For the first few minutes he stands motionless in a graceful pose Then, keeping time with the music, he takes a short step forward, slightly bending his knees and lifting his arms and hands to his eyes, gazing here and there as if searching for someone

With a suddenness that disconcerts the onlookers he leaps silently to the side and crouches, for he has sighted his enemy. For some time he remains in this stance, apparently waiting for his adversary to draw nearer. Then, springing into the air with drawn sword, he lets out wild shrieks and engages his enemy in battle, slashing with the sword and using the shield to ward off blows. The music becomes faster and faster while the dancer continues his gestures with ecstatic fervour. Finally, giving forth a terrible scream, he raises his sword and claims the head with one swift stroke. The crowd breaks into loud applause while the dancer leaves the floor. This is followed by a succession of dancers, each showing off his particular skill.

It is now time for the women to take over. A group of young girls stand with feet together, raising their arms outwards in time with the music. Then, taking very small steps with their knees slightly bent, they turn their bodies gracefully, moving from side to side. Such slow movements are necessary because of the heavy brass ear-rings hanging from their ears. After all groups have shown their skill, the host announces the big event of the evening — a solo Hornbill Dance by a woman known throughout the jungle as champion of the art. She steps on the stage dressed in a colourful Malay costume, *baju* and sarong, and holding in each hand a bunch of hornbill feathers. To the melodious music of the *sapits* she moves slowly, dips her body in curtsy and lifts her arms and hands upwards and lets them fall again to her sides. As she does this, the bunches of feathers in her hands open and close like a spreading fan. She turns and twists her body gracefully, while by clever wrist- and finger-work she continuously spreads and closes the feathers. She is imitating the great Hornbill bird in flight, an art which only the women of the Baram River can do well. The time is considerably past midnight when the party ends with another round of drinks.

The items of entertainment often include a very amusing test of endurance in the drinking competition. A huge jar some three feet high is filled with fermented rice wine into which is dipped a hollowed bamboo used as a drinking straw. Lovely young maidens escort the visitor or competitor to the jar whence he is to suck up the liquid by a stipulated amount, say one or two inches. The contents are registered by means of a float in another tube. The ladies encourage him; if he lifts his head from the jar before they consider he has drunk enough, strong female hands grab his neck and force him to finish

the quota required of him There is much excitement as each contestant takes up the challenge

We now turn to the other small groups — the Muruts, Kelabits and Penans, of whom the latter are the most retarded They live deep in the interior, some in the valleys of the tributaries of rivers and some in the hills in the upper reaches of the Baram River The Penans are the real jungle dwellers and are nomadic in character Their houses are mere temporary structures which they abandon when moving to another part of the jungle in search of food They still use primitive weapons and tools such as the blow-pipe Theirs is really a hard life The Muruts and Kelabits, on the other hand live in the hills and are hard-working agriculturists, but unfortunately they have a great weakness for drink, and most of their rice crop is converted into fermented rice wine which they consume in large quantities The wine is stored in jars and sucked up through bamboo tubes

What about the future of these pagans, the Dayaks, as they are collectively called? Despite what has been reported earlier as to the survival of primitive habits and customs in some areas, educational missionary work has spread far and wide throughout the interior Primary schools have been established at trading centres like Kapit, and at convenient places where the natives can send their children Here they are not only taught the rudiments of English and arithmetic, but are also given instruction in modern methods of agriculture and husbandry on which their livelihood depends The children and men have learnt how to dress Loin-cloths have been discarded in their place shirts and shorts are worn The women, too, are now covered from neck to ankles in Malay *bajus* and sarongs, and they are so Westernized that they even resort to using powder, lipstick and perfume

Many of the Iban, Kayan and Kenyah chiefs now own shops which they rent to Chinese traders, thus ensuring themselves a monthly income The money they earn through the sales of rubber and jungle produce has made it possible for them to build the shops The others also have not been slow to progress Many of them possess powerful outboard motors on their boats so they can travel quickly up and down river They have also learned to use sporting guns for hunting Many of them have ventured into commerce, setting up wooden sheds on the banks at places where there is much river traffic and selling motor oil, tobacco, sweets, biscuits, liquor and soft drinks

The Missions have established churches and many chieftains with their subjects have become Christians, although they still adhere to traditional pagan rites at festivals. Constitutional reforms, also, have been introduced which enable native chieftains to sit on District Councils and the Council Negri to express their peoples' views and wishes. Those capable are trained in civil administration. The World Health Organization has set up stations in various parts of the jungle to keep disease under control and to instruct the natives in matters of health and hygiene.

Yes, Western civilization is, of course, creeping into the interior. Wireless sets are installed in long-houses whose inmates listen to special native programmes of news and songs. The voices of their chieftains are often heard over the air and so are their favourite *pantun* singers. The larger trading centres have cinema halls showing Malay pictures and Western thrillers.

But many of the natives are still in doubt whether modern living will suit their way of life founded, as it is, on ancient customs. What chances have they — some argue — against competition from the Chinese who monopolize the bulk of the country's trade, and the Malays who hold most of the administrative posts? Yet the more progressive chieftains realize that their children and subjects must be educated if they are to fend for their future, for, after all, they are the native sons of the soil.

The British Government is doing all it can to encourage their advancement, and to develop among the multi-racial groups who inhabit the land an atmosphere of harmony which will enable them to live and trade in peace as one family in the great Commonwealth of Nations.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS

1 A hill river, dashing through rocks and boulders, breaking into foam-flecked rapids



2 The Belaga River, a typical inland stream with numerous rapids, where a boat may have to be hauled



3 The rivers of Sarawak are used as highways, with light canoes providing the transport



4 Heavy rains cause the rivers to rise and the rapids boil and froth into maelstroms



4 Heavy rains cause the rivers to rise and the rapids boil and froth into maelstroms



7 The Old Man of the Woods—the famous orang-utan from the Sarawak jungle



8 This worried little face belongs to the dark-handed gibbon, who also belongs to the Sarawak forest



9 A beautiful young Iban woman, dressing her long dark hair



10 This young Iban mother has collected a bouquet of hibiscus



11 An Iban girl, wearing traditional native dress, at home in the long-house



11 An Iban girl, wearing traditional native dress, at home in the long-house



12 The young women in Sarawak take a naive and rather touching pleasure in their own good looks. Justifiably, they are a little vain





13 Teen-age Iban girls, sporting dozens of plastic bracelets. In spite of the beautiful native work, ordinary artificial jewellery is extremely popular throughout Sarawak



14 Iban mother and daughter



15 An Iban warrior wearing a beaded cap with springing tufts of goat's hair



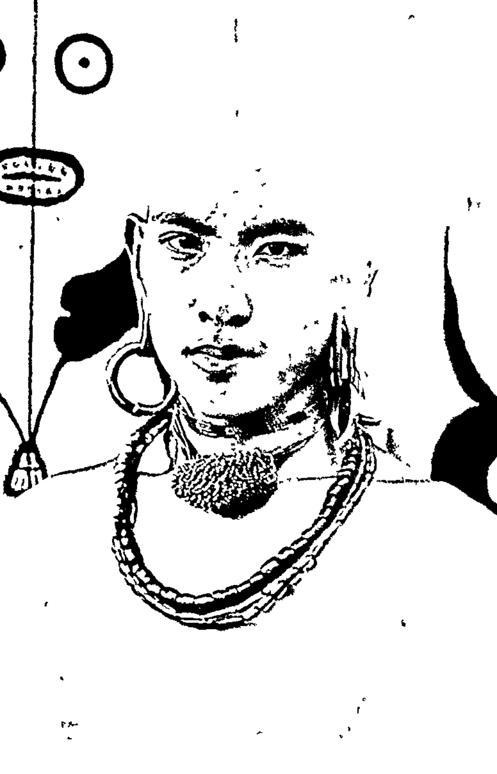
16 A typical Iban man, with pierced ear-lobes and intricate tattooing on throat and arms



17 An Iban chieftain resplendent with a cloak of monkey fur and a ceremonial head-dress



18 A Kelabit, probably the finest physical type in Sarawak. His hair is kept neatly trimmed and he sports massive brass ear-rings



19 A Kelabit chieftain. His ear-lobes have been enlarged and leopard-tooth ornaments inserted



20 An Iban fisherman. He has complicated and decorative tattooing all over his body



21 An Iban beauty, unself-conscious and graceful



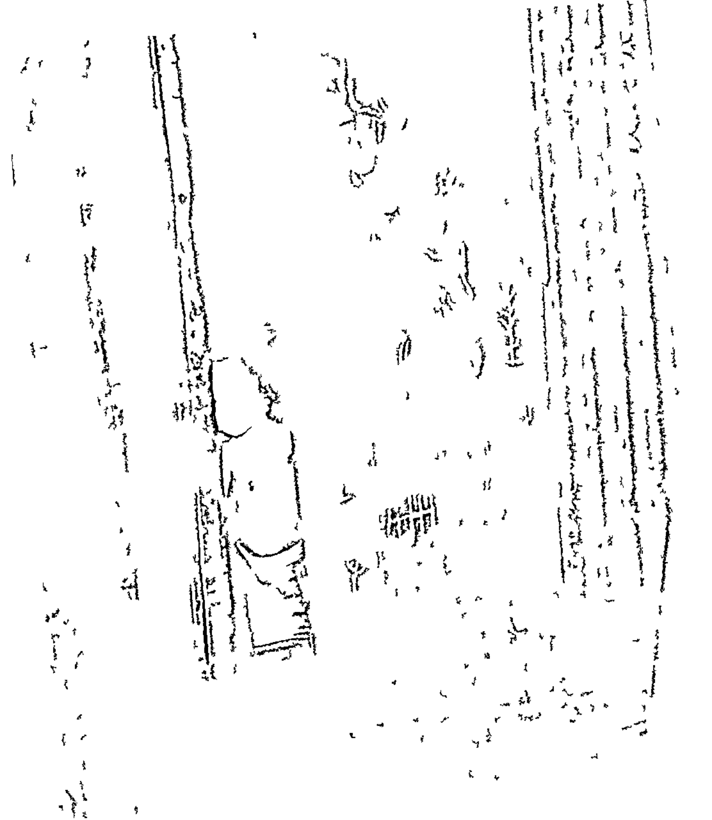
22 'Come as you are' the party-giver said. Magnificent examples of tattooing like this are seldom covered up on festival occasions. A minimal loin-cloth is the correct wear



25 A handsome young Iban couple in conversation by a waterfall in the Rejang. Ibans often marry very early, sometimes at fifteen or sixteen



26 An Iban child peeping curiously at visitors



27 Kelabit children, wearing caps of coloured glass beads and brass ear-rings in their elongated pierced lobes



28 Kayans, Kenyahs and Kelabits habitually pierce and elongate their ear-lobes. This little Kelabit girl has already amassed a quantity of heavy brass ear-rings



29 The longer her ears, the more lovely she is by some Sarawak standards. This is a young Kayan beauty



30 Two more young Kayan girls, wearing their traditional skirts, with slits high on the leg and coloured glass beads strung around their hips



31 A group of unmarried Kayan girls from the Baram River District. The long slit skirt they wear used to be a part of their traditional dress, but it is rarely seen nowadays



32 This thoughtful-looking Kayan girl is wearing Malay dress. Her ears have been elongated and reach almost to her shoulders



33 A Kayan long-house. They are usually neater and more substantially built than the Iban version



34 Inner gallery of a long-house, used as a general meeting-place for drinking and gossiping



35 A long-house, usually built a few hundred feet above a river bank, is entered by notched tree-trunks, rarely provided with a handrail



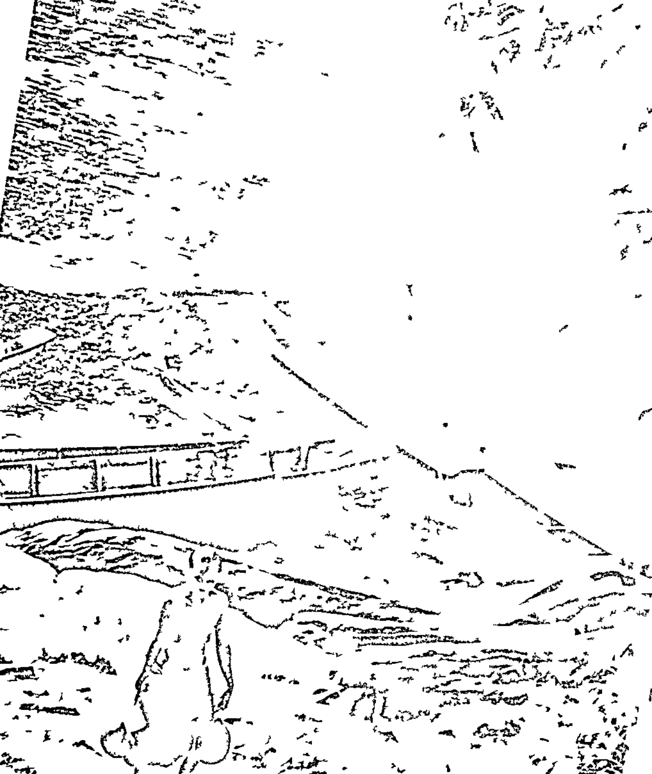
36 An Iban girl, needing no handrail, gracefully ascends her steep flight of steps



37 Girls fill their gourds with water after bathing



38 Water is conveyed to the long-house by means of the dried gourds which have been filled in the river



39 An Iban girl cooking at the family fireplace in a long-house, where each family is allotted a room for sleeping, eating, cooking and social life

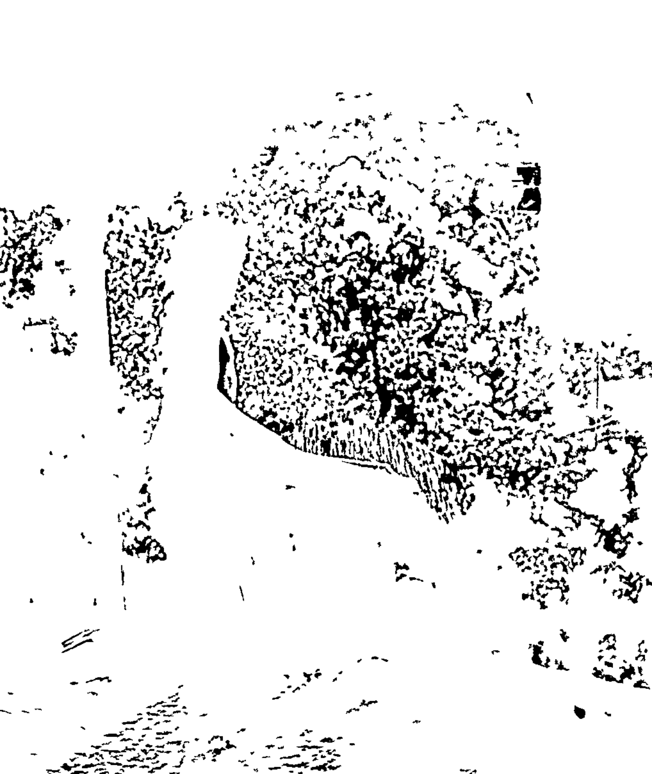


40 Iban girls working in the padi-field. Sarawak tribes live mainly by agriculture and rice is their chief food





42 A Kayan girl separating padi husk from rice after pounding. She tosses the padi into the air and the light husks are blown away



43 Each family brings its rice-crop to the long-house for threshing and each threshes its own



44 The rivers of Sarawak are full of fish. Iban women scoop up their catch with rattan baskets in the shallows



45 A Kayan hunter cooks his simple meal of rice in the jungle



46 Dayaks stop to cook their midday meal on the stony banks of the river, after working in the forest



47 Looking like a circus aerialist, this Punan is climbing a pole to harvest edible birds' nests in the caves at Niah



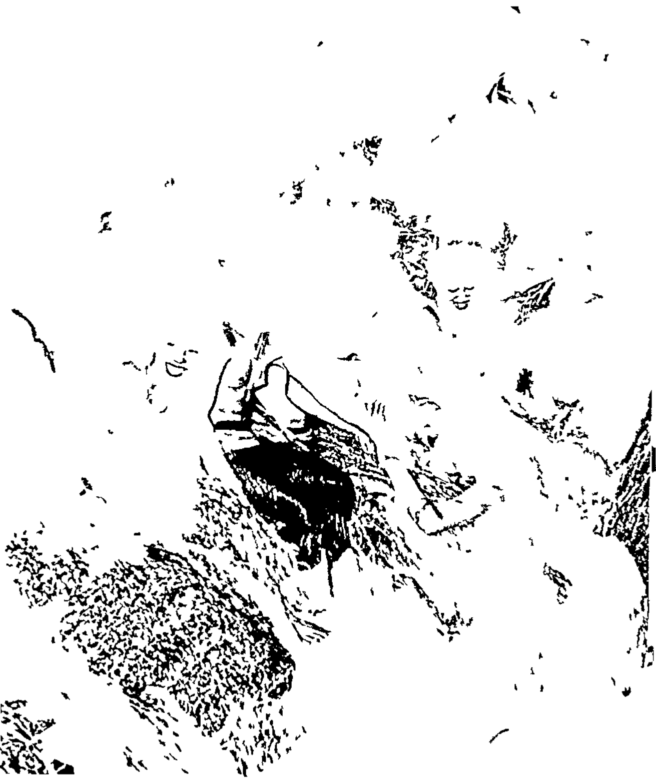
48 An Iban mother, with her child on her back, returns from a day's work up-river



49 An animated discussion while bathing—
the subject is probably men



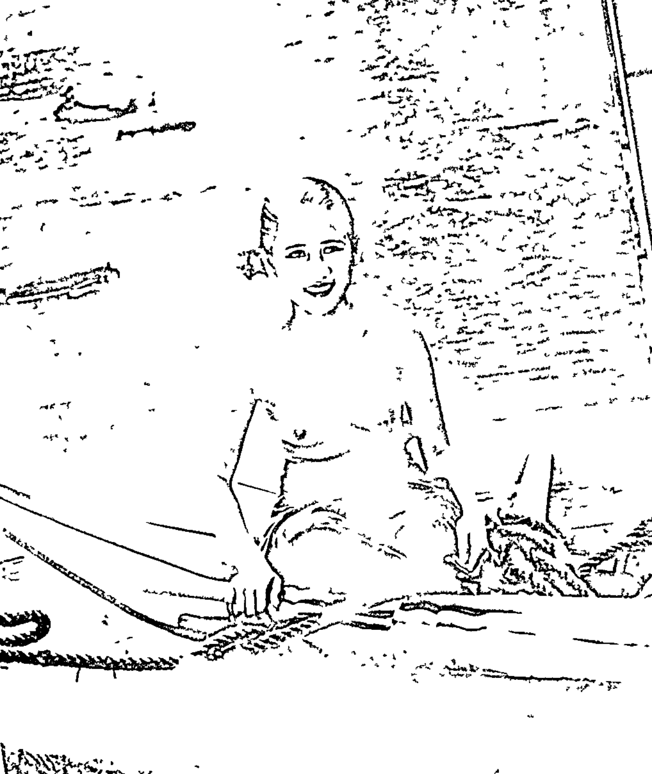
50 Iban girls splash and play like otters at one of the many waterfalls in the upper reaches of rivers



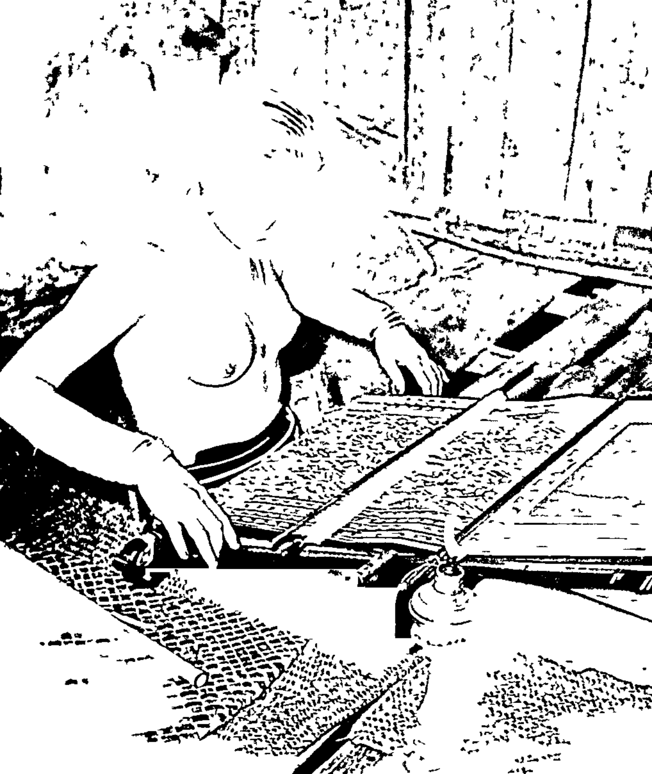
51 Dayak men and women like to be clean and bathe at least twice a day



52 An Iban girl with her boat by a waterfall



53 An Iban girl using a simple hand-loom to weave a *pua*, a blanket which will decorate the wall of the long-house at festival time



55 Dayak women make cartwheel hats, decorated with multicoloured beads, to sell to visitors at two pounds each



55 Dayak women make cartwheel hats, decorated with multicoloured beads, to sell to visitors at two pounds each



56 An Iban girl weaving by the light of the window. Electricity has not yet come to the long-house



57 A Kayan woman, with tattooed forearms, making a basket of bamboo and rattan



58 Dayak girls in happy indecision over artificial jewellery in a shop at Kapit, a small village about a hundred and fifty miles from the mouth of the Rejang River



59 Iban women, dressed to kill, on their way to attend a harvest festival



60 Children splashing about in their river playground. They swim like otters



61 Swimming over, they scramble on to the rocks. Note a certain divergence as to what the smart Dayak child should wear



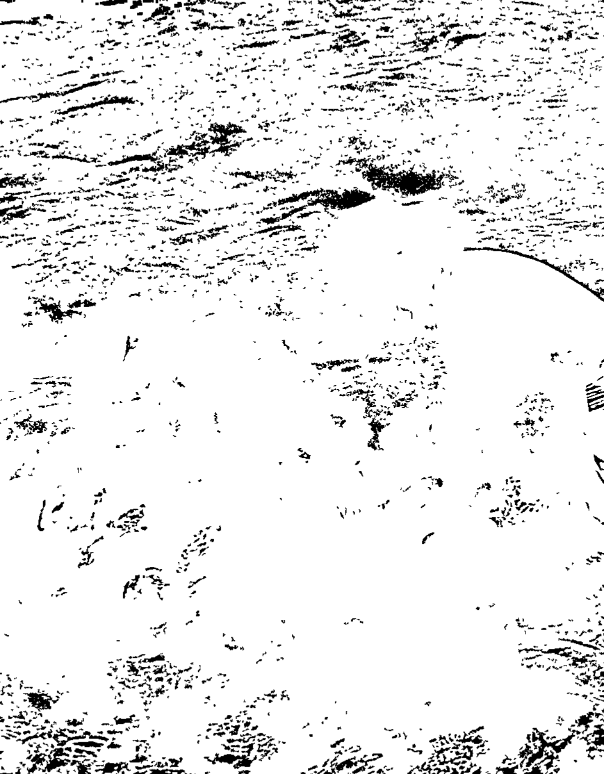
62 Dayak children are well cared for by their parents. Living an open-air life they are generally healthy, although they nearly all have pot-bellies



64 The mother sits quietly smoking a home-made cheroot of paper and tobacco. Her baby has been given a good start in life, from the Kayan point of view, by the acquisition of ear-rings to elongate the lobes



65 The children are bathed in the river from a few months old. Even though the water can be cold, they soon learn to enjoy it



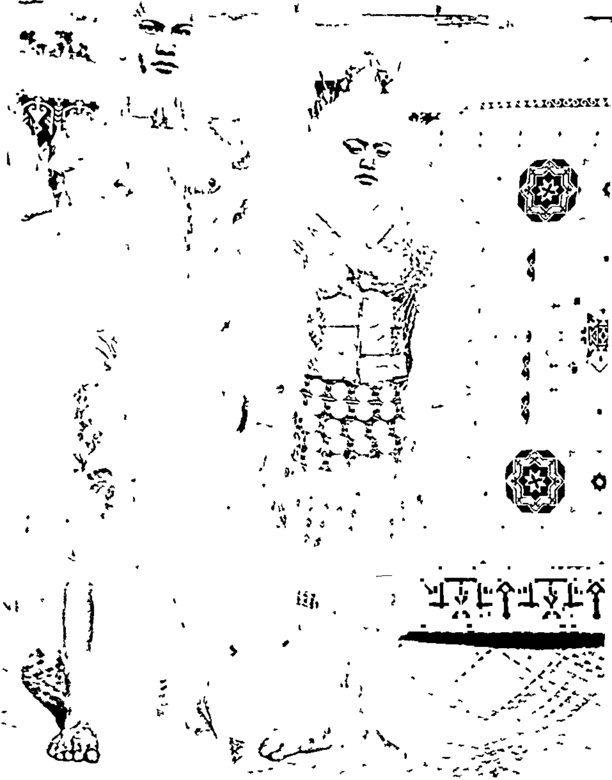
66 The beginning of a wedding ceremony; an Iban bride goes by boat to the long-house, where her bridegroom waits



67 An Iban bride in traditional glory at Simanggang. She wears a silver tiara decorated with paper flowers, and silver belts and hoops encircle her waist and hips



68 The actual ceremony: A wedding of an Iban couple, displaying traditional wearing of silver chains, belts and bracelets



69 On ceremonial occasions, such as a rice festival, the children come out in a great show of elegance, laden with silver chains, hoops and coins



70 An Iban girl in typical Dayak finery playing a drum at a festival



71 Kayans love to listen to the soft music of the *sapit*, a three-stringed instrument shaped like a viol



72 Kayan girls of the Baram River District playing a home-made bamboo zither, a nose-flute and a Jew's harp



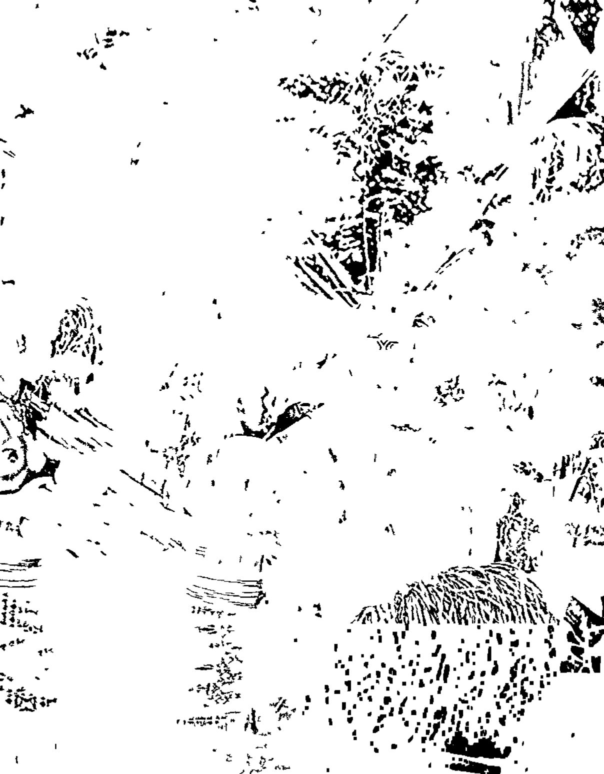
73 Men often provide music at festivals; one blows a home-made bamboo flute and the other plays a guitar



74 On gala occasions, the men catch up on the local news and consume a tremendous amount of *tuak*, a fermented rice wine



75 Iban girls offering bowls of fermented rice wine to a chieftain who has exorcized evil spirits with a sword and a huge mop of banana leaves



76 Omen-reading by examination of the liver of a newly slaughtered pig, undertaken before engaging in any enterprise, such as building a new long-house



77 Tattooed Iban warrior in a war dance



78 An Iban in full costume for a war dance, complete with a cap of hornbill feathers and silver belts and chains



80 A solo Hornbill Dance by a Kenyah woman, known throughout the jungle as champion of the art. By supple wrist and finger work, the bunches of hornbill feathers are made to open and close like a spreading fan

